

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with James "Chops" Jones -- April 7, 1997

Q: Interviewer Pauline Blount from the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. I have the privilege of interviewing Mr. James F. Jones. Good morning, Mr. Jones.

Jones: Good morning.

Q: I want to start out by asking you your full name.

Jones: James Floyd Jones. But everybody calls me Chops.

Q: Okay. And your place of birth.

Jones: Newark, New Jersey.

Q: What street or what hospital were you born in?

Jones: I was born on Warren Street. The corner of Warren Street and Washington Street.

Q: Okay. And your present occupation.

Jones: I'm a retired fireman. But I am a musician also.

Q: Okay. And your educational background.

Jones: Oh, high school. Two years of college. And that's it.

Q: Okay. What college did you attend?

Jones: NYU.

Q: Are you married?

Jones: Married and separated.

Q: Do you have children?

Jones: I have one son.

Q: All right. And what is his name?

Jones: James Neil Jones.

Q: What about your parents, particularly your father? Where was he born at?

Jones: My father and my mother were born in Virginia.

Q: Okay. What was your father's name?

Jones: Floyd Jones.

Q: Okay. And your mother?

Jones: Suzie Jones.

Q: What was her maiden name?

Jones: Her maiden name was Reed, Suzie Reed.

Q: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Jones: I have a sister.

Q: Okay. What is her name?

Jones: Ruth Jones.

Q: All right. Where does she live right now?

Jones: She lives at 275 Prospect Street in East Orange.

Q: Is your father still alive, are your parents?

Jones: Mother and father are both deceased.

Q: Have you, over the years, changed your name for any reason?

Jones: No. Except they call me Chops from playing trumpet.

Q: And how did that arise? Do you know?

Jones: Well, I used to be the one that hit all the high notes in the band. So they used to say, he got some chops. And so that's where I got the nickname.

Q: That's where you got the nickname Chops from. Are you a member of a religious faith or political organization?

Jones: Well, no. I'm a Baptist.

Q: All right. You were born here in the City of Newark so you didn't have to come from any other place.

Jones: No. I was born right here in Newark.

Q: Did you or your family, let's say your parents, were they born in Newark?

Jones: My parents were born in Virginia.

Q: Do you know about when they came to Newark?

Jones: Oh, let's see. I have letters from my mother when she was courting my father. That's around 1910, 1912.

Q: Did they get married in Newark?

Jones: Oh they were married. They got married.

Q: You don't have any idea what their journey was like in coming to Newark?

Jones: No. But my mother was already here. And my father, before they were married my mother was here working, and my father was still in Virginia. And they eventually got together and they got married, and, but I don't remember him because he died when I was four months old.

Q: Right. So therefore your parents settled in Newark and that was actually in reality their home.

Jones: Right.

Q: You know. Newark. So you didn't have to do any other traveling. What was the

neighborhood like where you lived?

Jones: As far back as I can remember, well I war born on Warren Street, but I can remember Hoyt Street. That must have been the next place where we moved from Warren Street. I remember Hoyt Street. Oh that was very, that was way back here. And I cam remember the fire engines. The fire engines, they had the horses, three horses and the engine on it, you know, with the screen, smoke and stuff coming up.

Q: Right. Was it a good community?

Jones: Oh very good community.

Q: Very good. What about, was there any commercial areas such as shops and businesses?

Jones: Oh no. Just the neighborhood stores.

Q: Like a residential area.

Jones: Residential. But Bamberger's was there. That was always there.

Q: From way back.

Jones: Bamberger's yeah. Bamberger's. And Hanes. Hanes and Bamberger's were the two big stores. Hanes, Bamberger's and Woolworth's.

Q: Were the community stores.

Jones: Were the big stores for me.

Q: Other than that location, where else did you and your family live?

Jones: Oh, let's see. When we moved from Hoyt Street, which is only a block long now, we moved to Jones Street. But we didn't stay there too long because we had to change schools. And we moved from Jones Street to Newark Street, right across the street from the Newark Street Theater. And then we stayed there about three or four years, and then we moved up further from Newark Street, on Newark Street. And we stayed there about a year. And we moved from that other place on Newark Street to Bergen Street. That's where we stayed, on Bergen Street until I got grown, you know, we stayed.

Q: Was it a very nice neighborhood?

Jones: Very nice.

Q: Very nice. Was it a mixed neighborhood or?

Jones: No. It was, we moved on Bergen Street, there's only two other houses that black people were in. All the rest were all Jews and Polish people. Jews and Polish people.

Q: How would you characterize the house that you lived in?

Jones: Oh, it was a nice house. It was, all the houses on Bergen Street were three family houses. Railroad flats, you know, the rooms out right from the beginning, right in the front go right to the back. That's why they call them railroad flats because would be on the side, but went right straight back.

Q: Straight back. Where did your parents do most of their shopping?

Jones: Right around in the area. Like for groceries and food, right around in, right in the area.

Right around the corner used to be a little Jewish store. And everybody went there. We didn't have to go anywhere because over on Avon Avenue and Bergen Street, about a block down from the corner, there was the laundry, Chinese laundry, and down a little further from that was the cleaning place. And up the street from us on Bergen Street, corner of Willow Street and Bergen Street, was a national shop, like an A&P, but it was a National. And we didn't have to go downtown. Right in the neighborhood.

Q: How were you treated by the merchant owners?

Jones: When I first went to Avon Avenue School, I was the, there were two other blacks there, but they were girls. And one was a, you know, the other blacks. One was a boy and the other two were girls. But they all were in the eighth grade. I was in the fifth grade. So when they graduated, I was the only one there. Oh they used to call me the boogie. Some of the older kids had their little, their younger brother and sister, and they did something that they didn't like, they'd say I'm gonna get the boogie, make the boogie get you. That was me. But that went on for about, oh about a year, until they got used to me, and then I was all right.

Q: Then everything was all right.

Jones: Everything all right. Especially after I start winning at the track meets, you know. Winning medals and at the track meets was all I ever won anything.

Q: So they treated you very nicely.

Jones: Oh, then I was all right then.

Q: The store owners did they offer any line of credit?

Jones: Oh yes. We were, they, what was that woman's name, Bailey. That was an odd name for

Jewish people, but we used to go around there and get all kinds of groceries. They had a book, and they would write up how much we owe, and my mother would pay them at the end of the week.

Q: So that was no problem in going there to do shopping because you didn't have to have money.

Jones: No. No.

Q: What were the eating habits like, you know, for you and your family? You know, what kinds of foods did you usually buy?

Jones: Well, we used to have, we always used to have oatmeal, but I never liked it. We had oatmeal, we had all the dairy milk delivered to us in bottles. And we very much ate what I eat now. Corn flakes and, in fact, my mother used to make, fix all our food. Make biscuits. We used to have a, our big meal was on Sunday. But during the week we ate, you know, like maybe neck bones or whatever she had to fix. And we didn't like it, we ate it anyway.

Q: Ate it anyway, right. Was the terminology of soul food was used then?

Jones: Oh no. No. We never heard nothing about no soul food. Nothing like that.

Q: Nothing. It was just your basic food.

Jones: Food.

Q: Without the soul name to it.

Jones: It was nothing like soul food like we have today. But the food was good or better than they have today.



Q: Right. As far as dress codes were concerned, in what way if any did people dress different than the people from the south?

Jones: Oh, well, I wore knickers.

Q: Did you?

Jones: All us boys wore knickers. And I can't say anything about the girls, but they always dressed nicely. My sister wore white ribbons in her hair. But the boys, all the boys, wore knickers.

Q: That was the custom.

Jones: Custom. Yeah. Most all the boys wore knickers. I hated long pants when I got to be, my mother wanted me to wear long pants. I hated that.

Q: Did you?

Jones: Yeah.

Q: How long did you wear them?

Jones: Oh I wore knickers all through high school. When I graduated from, no, I mean, I went to grammar school. And then I went to Avon Avenue School. Then I went to Cleveland Junior High because Avon Avenue School went to the eighth grade, but I didn't go to a regular high school. I went to Cleveland Junior High which had a ninth and tenth grade. So most everybody there had long pants on. So that's when I started wearing long pants.

Q: Back in the olden days we'll say, did you have a habit of calling any of your family, calling

people aunt and cousins that weren't really related to you?

Jones: No. I had a aunt and a cousin, let's see, an aunt. But they were, they never, my aunt was up in Tarrytown, New York. And the cousins, they were in Richmond, Virginia. So I never had no really, real close relatives here in Newark. But they did come to visit us sometime.

Q: Oh good, good.

Jones: But nobody I ever called uncle or cousin that wasn't really an uncle or cousin.

Q: Uncle or cousin. Okay. Were there any special events like birthdays or weddings or funerals that were observed?

Jones: Oh, yes. I used to have days, my mother used to give me a birthday party. We'd have them out in the backyard, and we'd have Japanese lanterns hanging on the clotheslines. We had a good time.

Q: Good time.

Jones: Oh. All my birthdays we used to have. My sister used to have a birthday. She'd invite all her little girlfriends and fellows. And I used to have birthdays.

Q: Did you get gifts and?

Jones: Oh, we'd get gifts and things.

Q: What kind of stuff did you get?

Jones: Oh, like handkerchiefs and ties. And I remember one time a fellow brought a bag or

marbles. That was good cause we all used to play marbles. And oh other little simple gifts. But not like, they wouldn't be called gifts now. Kids now want something more than what I got.

Q: Right. Marbles would probably taboo.

Jones: Marbles. Marbles. They wouldn't, what are we gonna do with marbles?

Q: They used to play marbles too.

Jones: Oh, I used to play marbles. That's all we'd bring to school. You know, before the bell rang, we'd be out there playing marbles.

Q: Did they have any special ones? Like color.

Jones: We had special ones. We have wheelies, those were the red ones. And we'd have the great big ones that if you wanted to knock out a whole lot of marbles that's in a circle you use our big, big giant. But these kids don't know nothing about marbles now.

Q: No. I don't even know if they sell them now, do they?

Jones: That I don't know.

Q: What about holidays? What were holidays like for you and your family? Like Christmas and Easter.

Jones: Oh Christmas. Oh, let me tell you about Christmas. Christmas we used to have real Christmas tree. It used to have candles on them. And we used to light the candles on the tree. And they say that's a fire hazard now. But on our branches we had little dishes, you'd put the candle in like the birthday candle, you put the candles in and you light them. Never had no fires.

Q: What kind of tree was it? A pine tree or a spruce?

Jones: Regular pine tree. Regular Christmas tree.

Q: And no fire.

Jones: Never had a fire.

Q: You're kidding.

Jones: Never had no fire. I never had no, never seen nobody else that had fires then. Now they got all kind of trees and they have fires all the time.

Q: Yeah. They do.

Jones: We had a lit tree, with lit candles on the tree.

Q: You're kidding. Did you have different colors?

Jones: No. All the same colors, lights. We didn't have no electric lights on it. Because when we lived on Hoyt Street, we didn't have no electricity. We had lamps. Had regular oil kerosene lamps. And we had the gas lights. And we used to go get the wick. It was a little white looking thing. And if you touched it, it would break. It was like that. I never knew what that stuff was made out of it. Looking like it made out of ashes cause if you touched it, it just collapsed. You couldn't touch it. And you put it on there, and you turned the gas on and light it, that thing would light up, give a lot of light.

Q: Great. That must have been beautiful. Where did you usually have it? In the living room.

Jones: In the kitchen, in the kitchen and the living room.

Q: Beautiful.

Jones: In the bedroom. We had, all the lights were gas lights, except maybe one of them would break or burn out, and we didn't have like the store was closed, then we'd use our kerosene lamp. But we didn't have no electric. It was a long time before we moved somewhere where they had electric. And the rents at that time, I look at some of the rent receipts my mother had. Thirty-five dollars.

Q: You still have them.

Jones: Yeah. Thirty-five dollars, rent receipt. Twenty-eight dollars.

Q: For how many rooms?

Jones: Oh, about, let's see. In the Hoyt Street we had, one, two, three, five, we had five rooms. At Hoyt Street. I think we were paying, mother was paying twenty-eight dollars a month.

Q: Get out of here. And that was living.

Jones: That was living.

Q: Would you share them if we wanted to make copies of them for publication?

Jones: Share what?

Q: The rent receipts.

Jones: Oh, I can look around and find them.

Q: That's beautiful that you still have those, you know. What about drugs or liquor or tobacco? Was that used back then?

Jones: Oh yes. Well, my mother smoked. My mother smoked Veteran Tobacco and she used to chew tobacco. And it's a wonder that I didn't get hooked on it cause I used to light the pipe for her all the time.

Q: She used a pipe?

Jones: Corn cob pipe.

Q: You're kidding.

Jones: Ten cents. Corn cob pipes cost ten cents then. Now I think it costs two or three dollars. And they were really made out of corn cobs.

Q: Like corn on a cob, cob.

Jones: No. It was like the part that you put the tobacco in was made out of corn cobs. And then the stem was wood. But that was actually a corn cob that they dried and like painted it or shellacked it over so it was hard. But now they got, it's a wooden. They still make corn cob pipes, but they're not corn. Just wood. And it's got like corn painted on it.

Q: Right. Probably an imitation.

Jones: Imitation. Yeah.

Q: But mom used to smoke a pipe.

Jones: Oh yeah. She smoked a pipe.

Q: What about dad?

Jones: I never remember him. He died when I was four months old.

Q: Yeah. So you have no knowledge.

Jones: I have no recollection of him except a picture.

Q: Right. Was anyone in the family smoking cigars or dipping snuff?

Jones: No.

Q: None of that.

Jones: My mother only smoked corn cob pipe and veteran's tobacco.

Q: What about medical practice, home remedies?

Jones: Oh we had those. She used. Our home remedy when I got a cold was Sloan's liniment. She used to put three drops of Sloan's liniment on a flat level teaspoon of sugar, swallow that down.

Q: And you would swallow it down.

Jones: Swallow that down. Make you cough up anything you had.

Q: What would you say would happen if you tried that today?

Jones: Nothing. I have done it. I do it today sometimes.

Q: So you still practice home?

Jones: I still do it when the cough medicine like that Vicks 44. When I see that's not doing anything good, I get me some Sloan's liniment, put three or four drops on a spoon of sugar, and take it on down.

Q: Get it out of your system.

Jones: Yeah. Some people that I know that's from the south, they used to put kerosene on the sugar.

Q: Kerosene?

Jones: Kerosene. And they claim that that's the same thing, but I never did with kerosene. I know that Sloan's liniment will get rid of a cold.

Q: That's a great idea. What about midwives? Did you hear of midwives?

Jones: There must have been midwives because I was born at home where we lived on Warren Street. I said Washington, but that was Warren Street and High Street, wasn't Washington. Warren Street and High Street where IT&T. I was born right on that corner. Used to be a house there. That's where we got our first dog, our poodle. That's how I know that house. And mother always used to take us there, and the dog we poodle we had, the Italian people that lived there. They had a whole lot of dogs. And the mother was still there. We used to take our dog down to see the mother.



Q: That was like family going to visit family.

Jones: Family dog.

Q: Great. Have you ever heard of the terminology of voodoo and whodo and roots?

Jones: Oh yes. Yes. Yes. My mother used to speak of that all the time. She used to tell me, I got to watch. Don't eat at other people. We never ate at nobody's house. They ask us to have dinner or something, we never ate. My mother said that, she always telling us about roots and whodo and voodoo and stuff. Roots. A lot of times she'd tell us stories about people down south in Virginia that got sick., they never found out what was wrong with them, cause she said somebody put some roots in their food or something. You know.

Q: So you didn't eat out.

Jones: I never ate from nobody. The only time I ate was at home.

Q: That's great. How was crime back then? Was there any juvenile delinquency?

Jones: No. No. The kids when I was coming up were, well I say were when I got out of high school or when I was going to high school, nobody was into no drugs but musicians and entertainers. Into a drug, like hard drugs or marijuana. No regular kids would think about nothing like that.

Q: It was taboo. You know you better not.

Jones: No. No. No. No kids. Never had no drug problems. Only drugs that was around and who was using them was musicians and entertainers.

Q: What about race relations? Were blacks getting along?

Jones: Oh yes. We never. In fact, when we lived on Hoyt Street, one of my little friends was a little Italian boy. I used to call him my brother. He used to come, he sometime, I remember one time I brought him home with me from school, and I told my mother my cousin's gonna eat supper with us. And she cooked supper for both my sister and I and my cousin. And I'd go to his house and eat their Italian food. And we didn't never have no problems with kids.

Q: They probably never looked at you as being.

Jones: No. No. We never looked at each other as black or white, you know. But I remember when we lived on Newark Street, we had a little gang of us that were all, just about in the same class when I was going to Central Avenue School. And two of our real comrades were named Albert. But one was colored and one was white. So in order to differentiate the two, we used to say, and we weren't like, we didn't mean anything by it, we'd call them white Albert and black Albert.

Q: Right.

Jones: And when we were speaking about one, they'd say who you talking about, white Albert or White Albert? No, black Albert. And they knew who we were talking about. But we never meant anything by white Albert or black Albert. That was just the way we separated each one.

Q: Right. You could tell the difference.

Jones: Tell the difference. Yeah. And we'd call, hey, white Albert. Or we'd say, hey, black Albert. If the two of them were in the same area, you know, we'd call, hey, white Albert, so he would know we were talking to him. But we didn't mean anything by that.

Q: Were there any major customs, traditions, like, that you might have picked up from the south that were?

Jones: No. When my father passed, my mother sent me down to my grandmother's in Virginia. I stayed there until I was two. But I don't remember any of that. Then she brought me back up here, up here to Newark.

Q: What about hunting and fishing and picking berries and things like that?

Jones: No. No.

Q: None of that. So overall would you say that as an African-American that you were treated well by people that were not African-American?

Jones: Oh yes. Yes. Very well. But the times were different then.

Q: Down through the years what kind of work have you actually done? Let's say starting with your first job.

Jones: Oh, let's see. First job I got, I have ever done and got paid for was playing music.

Q: Do you remember how much you were paid the first time?

Jones: Oh yeah. When I go to play, I used to get paid. I think we were getting paid two dollars and fifty cents.

Q: For a show?

Jones: A whole night. In fact, all the musicians around here in Newark was getting two dollar and

fifty cents.

Q: Was that top wages?

Jones: That was the top. Two dollars and fifty cents.

Q: Because you were African-American or?

Jones: Oh no. Everybody. Everybody.

Q: Where did you first play?

Jones: I can't remember where I first played. Let me see now. I can't remember the first job. I played so many places. I can't remember the first job.

Q: From your memory bank, give me a couple places that you have played here in Newark?

Jones: Everywhere in Newark that they got a place where a bar I played. Anywhere you name, I played there at one time or other.

Q: Okay. Give me a couple names.

Jones: Well, let's see. I got to get way back there. Kenney Club, Pat and Don's. Oh wow.

Q: Where was Pat and Don's at?

Jones: I think down near, somewhere in the Wickwake area I believe. This is going way back. The place up on Belmont Avenue, Masonic, Masonic Temple or the Masonic Hall. King Hirman's Hall. Club Harold. The Rin Tin Tin. The Blauvelt on Warren Street. Len and Lynn's.

The Ness Club. Club Harold. I said that. Highty Ho on Springfield Avenue which turned into the Lyric Bar. Oh there are so many little clubs.

Q: Was any of them owned by African-Americans?

Jones: They were all owned by black people.

Q: Okay.

Jones: There was a bar on every corner in Newark. Oh yeah, the Sugar Hill and Teddy Powell's. Some bars that were down neck, I can't remember them, but they down neck with, what's the big one, Paul. We're going way back now.

Q: Tell me about Teddy Powell's.

Jones: Teddy Powell's? Well, Teddy Powell's was a nice place. Only everybody that had any money was going there. That's down near Broad Street.

Q: And Teddy Powell's was actually a person, wasn't it?

Jones: Well, Teddy Powell was a person. He was the owner.

Q: Yeah.

Jones: Teddy Powell was the owner of Teddy Powell's nightclub. And he had something to do with the Sugar Hill. He was in the Sugar Hill with somebody else. Oh there are so many bars I played. I can't remember all their names.

Q: How were the working conditions?

Jones: Well, for me it was all right because I played trumpet then. But the pianist in the place had a very hard time because sometimes half of the keys didn't play, didn't work. And he had to struggle with the piano. And a lot of times the piano wasn't tuned enough, and the saxophone players had trouble trying to tune up to it. But, well, other than that, they had a good time.

Q: Right. Was there a union back then?

Jones: Oh yes, they put the union, but all the white boys was in it. We didn't have no union. And then when the white union I believe I don't think we had a black union here. We may have had, but I had never been in a black union here in Newark. And then when Poncho got to be, Poncho Diggs, got to be a union representative, he would go around trying to get all the black musicians into the union, Local 16. And he approached me one time to get into the union. I said, man, I don't need no union, I said.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Jones: Why would I need a union. I got to pay to get in the union and then gotta pay dues to work. I said, I'm working as much as I can work. Five or six nights a week. I said, I don't need no union. And he tried to show me all the different benefits that a union would give me. But I said, well, okay, I said how much is it? He said fifty dollars. I said, fifty dollars!

Q: Is that for a month or a year?

Jones: That's for the year. I said, man, I said, I can't make no fifty dollars. He said, well, give me what you can give me. The first payment I gave him was a dollar. And he used to catch up with me on all those different little jobs I had before. I think over a period of a year or more I finally paid the fifty dollars. And I've been in the local ever since. But now it's a hundred and some dollars to get in that same union.

Q: Did you have a card? Did he give you a card?

Jones: Oh yeah, we got a card.

Q: You still have it?

Jones: I have a lot of cards and a lot of union books, but I don't know if I have that first card. I think the latest union book I got goes back to 1950. But before that I wasn't in the union.

Q: How long would you calculate the years that you played?

Jones: Oh, I've been playing ever since 1932.

Q: So you've been at it a long time.

Jones: Oh yes But not in the union, though. I've been playing. I first started playing when I was in Cleveland Junior High. I took drumming lessons and I got into the drum and bugle corps. Fife, drum and bugle corps in Cleveland Junior High. Used to go out into all the parades. Plus I was a bugler in the Boy Scouts. So a lot of times when they had parades, like the parade. What is that Armistice Day parade they used to have. And I didn't know whether to parade with the Boy Scouts or parade with the fife, drum and bugle corps. So then different times I had to make a choice to go with either way. But been playing a long time. Ever since 1932.

Q: That's a long time.

Jones: That's a long time. And I played in the Army band when I was in the Army. Been in there a long time.

Q: What was the group like in the Army?

Jones: Oh, well, they're all professionals. We had two or three Duke Ellington musicians was in the same band I was in.

Q: Really?

Jones: Yeah. They didn't take anybody that couldn't read music or could play it. They'd test you right away to see whether you could play and could read the music.

Q: Right.

Jones: And to be in the band. But in the band, they only had, in our band they only had twenty-eight men that they actually kept. But I was in the quarter master, the quarter master training unit, they had about thirty something musicians there, but they were not all to be stationed there. There was only twenty-eight that stationed there, and all those others were surplus. And after they got their training, they were shipped out to different other bands and other regiments, other than in Virginia. So we kept our twenty-eight men. And a lot of times we'd get, when new recruits would come in, they'd find anybody there that's a musician, we'd take them in the band, check them out. And if they stayed, they'd be excess musicians, you know, to be sent somewhere else.

Q: Did you have the pleasure of meeting Duke Ellington?

Jones: No. I never. I've seen Duke Ellington, but I've never had the pleasure of meeting him face to face. I've seen his band on stage and what not, but never met Duke Ellington face to face.

Q: What, let's say, important band leaders did you work with?

Jones: Oh, let's see, go back, with, oh, I can't remember things.

Q: Take your time.



Jones: Paul Williams. He's still, I know, I think Paul, I don't know whether Paul is dead or not. Paul Williams, saxophone player. Let's see. Hal Page, and Hal Page was from around here. Hal Page. I played with Hal Page for about eight years. Hal Page used to, girlfriend was this, what's her name?

Q: Lynn Scott.

Jones: Scott. And a lot of times when, I didn't have a car then, he'd bring me home because I lived not too far from where Mrs. Scott lived.

Q: Right.

Jones: Up here the Scott Manor. Mansion. Sometimes I'd sit in the car, he'd go up there to see her. And sometimes I'd fall asleep. He'd come wake me up. He say, cmon I'm taking you home. I wouldn't know what time it was, you know. A couple of times he'd be in there for daylight when he brought me home. He's up there sleeping with the woman. And let's see, I was supposed to go with Tiny Bradshaw, but I never did cause I was working then and I couldn't get a leave of absence. Let's see. Oh, Mandy Ross. I played with Mandy Ross. I played with, when I come out of the Army, I played with James Phipps' band. Hal Ford's band. Gene Tolson's band. What was this girl's name, used to play with the Sweethearts of River. She used to live right in this building. I'll get her name straight in a minute.

Q: Take your time.

Jones: She used to be the soloist, one of the main soloists, in Sweethearts of River. And she's in a nursing home now. She used to live up over me in this building. I can't think of her name.

Q: It'll come to you later.

Jones: Then I used to play with another group, a Mary Smith. She was a bass player. I played at the Boston Plaza with her.

Q: The Boston Plaza was here in Newark?

Jones: Yes. Boston Plaza on Boston Street. Oh me, so many bars I played in, and nightclubs. And I played at the, well more recently at the Playboy in New York. And the Hawaii Kai. At the Playboy my boss was. The names get away from me. Trombone player. I can't think of his name. Well, any place on the East Coast around here in Newark I played. They changed the names now, but I played almost every club here in Newark. And so many clubs in New York. Club Baron in New York. The Long Island at the Red Carpet in Long Island.

Q: These are in New York?

Jones: In New York, yeah. Connie's Inn. The club there that the basketball star, Wilt Chamberlain club. Names get away from me. But played a lot of clubs.

Q: How was your relationship with people that you worked with?

Jones: Oh always really good. Musicians are like a different breed of people. Musicians, entertainers, they're always all get along with each other. Even when I was in the Army and it was all segregated, used to, the white musicians in the different regiments would sneak up and come up in our regiments to jam with us, and we'd go down there and go into their barracks and jam with them. But we never had no problem with racial problem.

Q: No problem at all.

Jones: No.

Q: Do you still have in your possession any uniforms or anything that you, like your Army uniform?

Jones: Oh, when I sold the house, my Army, left it hanging down the basement. My Army uniform, my hat, everything right there in the basement hanging up.

Q: You left it.

Jones: Left it.

Q: Any particular reason?

Jones: No. No reason. Left a lot of things there.

Q: Right. Because you didn't want to take them.

Jones: That I wasn't taking. Cause I was moving into an apartment, I couldn't take all that stuff.

Q: Yeah. Changing the pace a little bit, do you belong to a church now? Or do you attend?

Jones: Shamefully, I haven't been in a church. Well, I've been to church for the Martin Luther King, different times for Martin Luther King affairs, but not as a member of the church. The church I was a member at was Zion Hill Baptist Church. That's where I was baptized. And I just don't. I haven't been to church in years. I look at the church sermons on Sunday on TV.

Q: Well, that's your church.

Jones: That's my church.

Q: Right. Do you belong to any Elks or Masons or anything like that or bridge clubs?

Jones: I belong to the, well, I don't belong to the Masons. They've been trying to get me for years. I belong to the American Legion. And the AARP.

Q: What's AARP?

Jones: That's all the senior citizens. All the senior citizens belong to that.

Q: All right. What activities do you do?

Jones: I don't. They send me all kind of letters and things, but I don't get involved. I've got books and pamphlets they get. I ain't even read them.

Q: Just put them aside.

Jones: Just put them aside.

Q: Political activity. Are you involved politically?

Jones: No political.

Q: No political. What about community activities?

Jones: Community activity. Well, just hardly.

Q: Do you have any hobbies?

Jones: Oh, yes, I have hobbies.

Q: Tell me about them.

Jones: Oh, I've always had hobbies. I used to make airplanes. Belonged to an airplane club. I used to belong to the Bamberger's Airplane Club. I was the only black in there. And for years I was building airplanes. I remember I built a ten foot gasoline model. Entered it into a contest over there in New York, and I had a friend of mine, she used to play in the Bounds of Rhythm, when I was playing the Bounds of Rhythm band at the Shady Rest. Played with Bounds of Rhythm. Well, we started the band from scratch. But not to make a long short, Bobbie Tucker which was our piano player, when the band broke up, he got to be Billie Holliday's piano player. When she died, he got to be Billie Eckstein's piano player. When Billie Eckstein died, now he's Tony Bennett's piano player. But he took me over to New York with my ten foot gasoline model to this contest which was at, where Lincoln Center is now used to be Lincoln, what is it now, Lincoln Center?

Q: Lincoln Center.

Jones: It's Lincoln Center now. It was Lincoln something else, Lincoln something else before it was Lincoln Center. Big place. Big auditorium. Like a big armory. That's where they had this contest. And I brought my, Bobbie Tucker, he had the car then, he took me over there in this big armory, they had hundreds and hundreds of airplane, motor boats. You name it, they had it. Models, you know. And the class they put mine in was the gasoline model class for the models up to ten, fifteen, twenty feet. And the class that I was in I won first prize. But you had to leave your model there. And for two days, to be on exhibition for two days, and the third day we come and they were gonna decide in what category, all the different categories, who had first prize, second prize, third prize. When they found out who I was and who owned the one that had first prize, oh they said, oh this must be a mistake. And don't you know, they shoot me down to third prize.

Q: You think it was because your African-American?

Jones: That's right. Because they saw I was . See cause Bobbie took the plane over there. He was the one that carried it cause I sat in the car so he wouldn't get a ticket.

Q: Right.

Jones: He carried my plane inside, you know.

Q: Was Bobbie white?

Jones: Bobbie, he looks like he's white. You know, he's real, very light skinned. And his mother, well she's passed now, you couldn't tell her from a white woman. We never thought of nothing like that. You know, he took my plane in while I sat there to keep him from getting a ticket. And he went in and brought the plane in, and the people that put the planes on the spot where they wanted. They take the plane and put it where they want it. So then after he came out, then I went in and I saw where the plane was so I would know where it is when we came back. So they must have thought that he was the one that made the plane. You see. So when I was there declaring my first prize, they say, oh no, no, no, there must be a mistake here. And they got their heads together, the judges and what not, and when I walk up I was the third prize. I had third prize. I got a little medal. But I had had the first prize until they saw who made it.

Q: Did you try to pursue it or that's the way?

Jones: No. It was no sense. In those days around, when I was up in the teens, I had a lot of things like that. And then when I got to be in my twenties, I went to school to Casey Jones' School of Aeronautics which is down on Raymond Blvd. That great big long building just before you get to Penn Station.

Q: Right.

Jones: That used to be Casey Jones' School of Aeronautics, that whole building. I went there for three and a half years and graduates and then they sent me over to New York, over to Casey Jones in New York. They had an advanced school over in New York. Roosevelt Field. I don't think Roosevelt Field is there no more. Anyway, when I was at Casey Jones, they called me in the office one day, and this Casey Jones himself, he asked me. I was the only black there. He asked me why did I choose to take this airplane mechanics course. I said cause I like working with airplanes. I said, I like airplanes and I one day would like to learn how to fly planes. So he says, well do you know this is a very hard business for a black man to get into. So, he said, did you know that? I said, well, no I didn't know that. He said, well, I'm telling you. He says, very hard field for a black man to get into. He says that's why I'm asking you why did you choose this. He said, because it's almost impossible for you to get into. I said, well, there's got to be a first somewhere. So that's why I stayed with it. And then when I went over to New York, went over to Casey Jones, they called me in the office, after about three months in school, and for no, out of the clear blue sky, the instructor came over and said, Jones, he says they want you in the main office. I said, well, for what? He said, that I don't know. Went in there, the same Jones sitting back in the chair. Said, I see you're still here. I said, yeah. It's still hard for a black man to get in this field. He said it's almost impossible. I said, well, I'll stick it out. And I stuck it out. But, not to go into a whole lot of details. I finally one day went down to Newark Airport to the Civil Service, they had Civil Service down in the airport, and I applied for airplane mechanic at Civil Service. And oh they give me a hard way to go. All these different questions they ask me. And they tell me anything that you work on you have to okay, you have to okay it and you have to sign your name to it. I said, well, I said if I sign my name to it, that means that I worked on it and it's all right. Else I wouldn't sign my name to it. Well, they give me a run around. So finally I got to work. And oh I've worked there a long time. When I say a long time, before I had any problems. And they were working on planes that had come back from overseas that were all shot up. And we were fixing the holes in them, you know, putting more skin on them, you know. Which they called that, they say skin, but it's really aluminum. And they even made a movie of me and a white boy working on the planes, you know.

But now, here's where they made me feel kind of like, the racial thing came in. Instead of

having me on the outside where the camera is, we were putting rivets in a piece of aluminum that we're doing to covering the hole, and you have to put rivets in. Someone has to block the rivets while the other one's with the rivet gun. And I say buck it, that means you got to have a big heavy piece of steel and put on the back of the rivet so the rivet will flatten up. They had me on the inside bucking with the little rivet, with the heavy medal, can't be seen by the cameras.

Q: Unseen.

Jones: Unseen.

Q: Invisible.

Jones: And the white boy he was out there in the movie, you know. And I figured we were gonna take turns, you know. But when they was finished, I come out of the hole, out from inside the plane, don't nobody know nothing about me.

Q: What year was this event?

Jones: This was. Oh this must have been about forty, well, war was still going on, 45. It was near the end of the war. About 45, 1945, in the early part of 45. Around that time I started feeling the, you know.

Q: Segregation.

Jones: Segregation, you know. Then, I knew it was all down south. Because when I was down there when I was in the Army, black would go to one bathroom and whites go to another. When I got ready to get on the bus to come home, the bus would be empty and I'm standing up there, the first one in line. And they would say, and the driver he's standing there letting all the people go on, the white people go on. I'm standing there, I was the first one there. He let all the white people go



on. I've got a solider, got my uniform on. Me and my, four or five other blacks stand me behind me. He let all the white people get on until the bus was almost full, and he got about three or four seats in the back. He said, all right got room, got room for four niggers. Yeah. I got room for four, this was down there coming up here. Cause up here they didn't say that, and they didn't do that either up here when we was getting on the bus. Anybody could get on. But down there, they would say I've got room for four niggers. The first time they did that to me I didn't move because I ain't no nigger. And I didn't move. He said, he looked right at me. He said, you gonna get on nigger. So I went on, got on the bus. And the rest of the blacks behind me got on. But I couldn't deal with that. I should have known that it was, I should have known it was like that. The only other time that I ran into that was in the fifties. I went on, I believe it was around the fifties, I went on a tour with Chuck Willis' band. And we went all through the south. We went all down in, down North Carolina, Virginia. North Carolina's when I left the band.

We stopped at a place, the bus stopped at a place on the road, like a general store. They had everything. A lot of the guys had to go to toilet and some of the guys were hungry. I remember going into this store, it was a gasoline station but it had a big, it was a store too.

Q: Right.

Jones: I go in there and I see the guy at the counter waiting to buy cigarettes. So some of the guys went up to the counter where they had hamburgers and hot dogs. But I went over to get my cigarettes, and there was one white guy standing there. And I waited til he finished waiting on the white guy, and I asked him did he have. No, I didn't ask him did he have. I told him I said, I'll have a pack of Pall Mall. And the guy, he went right on like he didn't hear me. So I said, well, maybe he didn't hear me. So I said, can I get a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes. And he still walk around like he didn't hear me. I said, I know he heard me this time. I said, hey buddy, I said, can I get a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes. So he said, we don't serve no niggers here. So I, another trumpet player that was standing there with me. I said, did you hear what he said? He said, yeah, man, cmon, let's go get something to eat. I said, no, no, no. I'm gonna get me some cigarettes. I'm going to pull that sucker. I ain't gonna tell you what I said. I'll pull the sucker over behind the

counter. So he said, no man, don't start no, don't start no trouble. I said, okay. So, the man he was just standing there waiting to see what I was going to do. I don't know whether he had a gun behind the counter or what. So just about that time when I was trying to make up my mind to do, in comes a great big, big about six feet tall, state trooper. Oh that's all right here, you know, with a cowboy looking hat. He called the guy behind the counter by the name. He said, how you doing? He said, this nigger here is trying to get fresh with me. He said, which one? He said, this one right here. He said, what's wrong nigger? I said, nothing wrong officer. I said, I just asked him for a pack of cigarettes and he said he don't sell cigarettes to nigger. So he said, what did you say? I didn't say anything. So he said, well, if he don't want to sell you no cigarettes, he don't have to sell you no cigarettes. I said, okay. So I said how about the hamburgers and hot dogs? He said, well, go on over there and see. He said, the rest of them niggers over there are getting them. So I said, no sir, I don't want any. I went on back out to the bus. And that's where that ended. But I should have known from being in the Army how them people were.

No way in the world that I could move down there. They say it's nice down there now. No way in the world I could move down there. I've seen how it is. Cause I've been down there with Pop Warner football teams, you know. And there are a lot of them that are nice, but a lot of those real small town people, I can't be bothered with them.

Q: Still the same.

Jones: Still the same. In fact, they're still the same up here. There's a lot of them up here the same. I guess they moved from down there up here. Because we got a lot of them here that got the same way.

Q: They're racists.

Jones: Yeah.

Q: Back in growing up and even as an adult, how did you get news? By newspapers or radio or

whatever?

Jones: Well, when I was coming up, when I was a kind, they used to have newspapers and they used to have extras. Anytime at night when something happened, they'd print extras. The boys, the kids be running around, hollering extra, extra, so and so happened. Like somebody got killed. Somebody prominent got killed, you know. And we had radio. We didn't have no TV.

Q: What station did you usually listen to?

Jones: Oh. I don't remember what stations we had, but we used to listen to the radio.

Q: Was it a black station or?

Jones: No. We didn't have no black station.

Q: Do you recall in your mind any outstanding blacks?

Jones: Outstanding blacks. I started paying attention to, the only outstanding blacks that I remember, cause I remember like Chick Chocolate, boxer. And Joe Louis. Joe Louis was like our idol. And anytime Joe Louis fought everybody stayed up.

Q: To listen to him or what?

Jones: To listen to the fight on the radio. Anytime that Joe Louis, the first time Joe Louis lost to Max Smelling, well, everybody was outside crying like somebody hit them. Grown people.

Q: It was that important?

Jones: Yeah. Joe Louis was one of my idols. Louis Armstrong. That's who I copied. Louis

Armstrong was one of my idols. And, well, Duke Ellington was. But I, when I was coming up, I could never understanding Duke Ellington's music. It was too weird for me, you know. I didn't understand Duke Ellington's music until Brent Webster got into the band. Then it started making sense. But before then, they were all trying to like make all kind of weird sounds, like the trombones would be playing, but not like trombones. And Coody Williams was making all kinds of growling sounds on the trumpet, not like I would usually hear. But when Brent Webster got into the band, that's when I started listening to the band.

Q: It encouraged you.

Jones: Oh the band sounded good with Brent Webster in it. I imagined it sounded good before.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Jones: It was up around Fairmount Avenue, somewhere up around that way. It was a house that she had. My mother used to go over there. She was like, it wasn't like a beauty parlor, like a store front.

Q: Okay.

Jones: It's a house.

Q: It's a regular house.

Jones: She'd go there and get her hair done. And that's where I remember, the time I went there there was a, was this house and she had a lot. That's where, in fact, that's where I made the airplane. This was a lot right next to the house. They had the car there. I had plenty of space to make the airplane for that particular parade. But I since have run into her when my boss, Hal Page, was going with her. And she had the place up here on High Street.

Q: High Street.

Jones: That's where I remember I used to go. Sometimes I didn't want to sit out in the car, I'd sit up inside, you know. Sit there and go to sleep. Waiting for him. But another time I played at a bar, I can't remember the bar, the place is still there on the corner of South Orange Avenue and, South Orange Avenue. They change the streets names up on me so much I can't remember. It's Belmont Avenue. But when Belmont Avenue crosses over South Orange Avenue. Right on the corner of South Orange Avenue and Belmont Avenue this was this bar. And her daughter used to work there. Scott's daughter.

Q: Right.

Jones: And she's a little short, nice looking girl, used to work there as a barmaid. And I met her there. I didn't know it was her daughter until somebody told me that it was Mrs. Scott's daughter.

Q: In reference to the Krueger-Scott Mansion, do you know anyone that used to work in the mansion.

Jones: No.

Q: When it was owned by the Kruegers.

Jones: I know the Kruegers used to have, oh, a lot of things going on. Kruegers. Cause I know Kruegers used to take all the little kids for picnics. Used to go over to Krueger's auditorium there on Belmont Avenue.

Q: Right.

Jones: And they'd take us all. There would be eight or nine buses. They'd take us on picnic, and

we'd be gone all day. Feed us all day long. And every year they'd do there.

Q: What did you eat?

Jones: Oh, they had all kind of sandwiches. Sandwiches and sodas. They fed us all day long. Sometimes they'd take us, I don't know where they took us, but it was amusement parks like, you know, they had roller coasters and all them cars that bump into each other.

Q: Right.

Jones: Yeah. White and colored.

Q: Good.

Jones: And there'd be hundreds and hundreds of kids going on that Krueger's outing. But they, I've gone on about four times.

Q: You had a good time.

Jones: Oh, I had a good time. All they was worried about all the parents would be there waiting for them when the bus came back, you know.

Q: How would you summarize, sum up your experience in being a Newark resident?

Jones: Oh, I have no regrets. If I had to do it all over again --

Q: You'd do it.

Jones: -- I'd say I'd be right here in Newark.

Q: Be right here in Newark.

Jones: Right here in Newark. Yeah.

Q: Give me one good reason as to why you're still living here.

Jones: Well, out of all the places I've been around the country, it's good to be back home where you know friends, neighbors, people that you've been knowing for years. A lot more people. A lot of other places, but it's not like being at home. Where you went to school, you grew up here, different things happen.

Q: Sort of being on your own territory.

Jones: Right.

Q: That's what it's all about.

Jones: Nothing like being in your own territory.

Q: Are you still active in playing?

Jones: Oh yes. Yes.

Q: Where do you play at now?

Jones: Anywhere. Anybody call me, I'm ready.

Q: Your recent place.

Jones: Let's see. Yes. The last place I played was the VFW Hall on Mulberry Street here.

Q: Here in Newark.

Jones: Right here in Newark.

Q: So you have no reason to retire have you?

Jones: Oh no. No. In fact, when they had the jazz festival, I played the first jazz festival for Sarah Vaughn at Symphony Hall. I had my group play there. I was playing with my group.

Q: How many members?

Jones: How many in the group?

Q: Yeah.

Jones: Eight.

Q: Eight. So you're feeling good.

Jones: Oh yes. Yeah. I'll never retire from playing.

Q: Once a jazz legend, always a jazz legend.

Jones: Well, I don't know about that legend part, but I just, I like playing. [Laughter]

Q: In any of the, let's say your instruments or any other materials that you might still have in your possession, would you mind us taking photographs of them or sharing them with us at some time?



Jones: Like what?

Q: Like your instruments that you play or any material that you might have. Sheet music or whatever.

Jones: No. I wouldn't mind.

Q: Good. Because in the near future, we might ask you for some items just to photograph them. Not to take the originals or whatever. Okay I'm going to sign off here. Mr. Jones, it has been my pleasure to interview someone like you. It's always a learning experience to talk to someone of your caliber. And I really appreciate your taking the time with and sharing this information with the Scott-Krueger Mansion Oral History Project. It's been my privilege.

Jones: Well, it's been my privilege to speak to you, to talk to you. There are so many things I can't remember, but, you know, they will come to me later. But so many places I played and different things happened. Oh yes, a friend of mine just passed away last week. I found out about it, Arthur Leaks. He's a musician and composer. And he did most of the, not most, but a lot of the songs that Jimmie, little Jimmie Scott is doing now, made his comeback. Arthur Leaks did a lot of his work, a lot of his material. Arthur Leaks was playing with me up in Boston. Arthur Leaks was, well, he wasn't playing, he was singing with me up in Boston. And I just remembered. You know, so many things I can't remember, and I just found out that he passed.

Q: You're kidding.

Jones: And I found out when he passed, he was already buried.

Q: That was recently?

Jones: Recently. Now he lived by himself. And he was dead about a week before they discovered

it. Yeah. So that's why I never got to, I never got to see him. So many things go on.

Q: Yes. That may pass you by. And you didn't know that they happened.

END OF INTERVIEW

x.